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PAPERS
OF THE
WAYNE COUNTY, INDIANA,
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL. I.—No. 2

The Institutional Influence of the
German Element of the Population
in Richmond, Indiana

By FRED J. BARTEL



RICHMOND, IND.
NICHOLSON PRINTING & MFG. CO.
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Bartel, Fred J.

... The institutional influence of the German element of the population in Richmond, Indiana, by Fred J. Bartel. Richmond, Ind., Nicholson printing & mfg. co., 1904.

27 p. 22^{cm}. (Papers of the Wayne County, Indiana, historical society, v. 1, no. 2)

1. Germans in Richmond, Ind. I. Wayne County historical society, Richmond, Ind.

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THE INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCE OF THE GERMAN ELEMENT OF THE POPULATION IN RICHMOND, INDIANA.

PROBABLY one of the most important factors in the history of the world has been man's impulse to leave his native land in search of a home, where the conditions might be more favorable to his existence. In this way it has sometimes happened that a stronger people has displaced a weaker, but more often the union or fusion of the different races has taken place, and a better and more vigorous life has resulted. During ancient and mediæval times, forcible conquest generally accompanied any change, but during modern times, this has been, in a measure, superseded by peaceful colonization.

The exact land on which Richmond is now built, was not taken up until in the Spring of 1806. In that year John Smith, Andrew Hoover, Jeremiah Cox, Benjamin Hill, Robert Hill and a few others, arrived here and selected land for farming. The farm which John Smith secured was on the south side of what later became the National road, and it extended some distance both east and west of the Whitewater river. The farm of Jeremiah Cox adjoined that of John Smith, lying

just north of the National road. The Hoover, Hill and Cox families were members of the Friends Church, and after seeing the possibilities of the valley, these honest pioneers sent glowing descriptions of the country to acquaintances of their denomination, residing east.

As a result many Quakers found their way to this valley, and in 1816, after having cleared and cultivated his lands for scarcely ten years, John Smith found the demand for homes in this vicinity so great, that he decided to lay out a town. The town consisted of what is now known as South Fourth and Fifth streets, and was named Smithsville. Two years later (1818), Jeremiah Cox platted his farm, and named the village Coxborough. This village extended as far east as what is now North Sixth street, and as far west as the river. This addition was soon occupied by immigrants, and in this same year the two towns were combined under the name of Richmond. The population of the town at this time (1818) was probably not more than 150, and of these more than a hundred belonged to the Quaker or Friends Church.

Owing largely to the natural fertility of the surrounding country, and the splendid water power afforded by the stream which ran through the city, we find that during the next ten years the population grew steadily and healthily. The wave of Quaker immigration to Richmond, which from the first had surpassed

all other immigration, reached its height between 1820 and 1830. A census of the city in 1828 gives Richmond 824 inhabitants, and authorities estimate that of this number, more than 500, or between 60 and 70 per cent. of the people were members of the Friends Church. It is probably safe to say that from the founding of our city until at least 1840, did the Quaker people steadily continue to constitute at least two-thirds of the population of Richmond. Thus, during all these years and for fifteen or twenty years afterward, it is but natural to find Quaker leaders along every line of progress.

During the time that the Quaker people formed such a decided majority of the population, it is plainly seen that a large per cent. of the political issues of this city would be decided by the Quaker vote, and the municipal government was also largely controlled by the Quaker residents. Furthermore, the Friends as a people were supreme, and led the way in all things social and religious. From the first the Friends seem to have appreciated the value of education, and a school was established as early as 1812. The denominational schools of the Friends received splendid financial support, and, as a consequence, they were taught by efficient instructors of the Quaker faith.

But it is when we look at the situation from an industrial standpoint, that the ascendancy of these people is most clearly seen. We have observed that the Quaker wave of immigration was the dominant

wave during the first quarter century of the settlement of this district. This being the fact, we find as a consequence that the Quaker people were the first or original land holders. In the first years when real estate, both farm lands and city property, was very cheap, it was these people who bought and occupied the desirable lands. The first stores and mills of various kinds were largely owned and managed by the Quakers. As the city grew, the Quaker prestige continued to rise, and the majority of Richmond's buildings, industries, banks, etc., continued to be the property of Quaker citizens. They, as an element of Richmond life, were probably at the height of their power between the years 1845 and 1850, but, by the close of the Civil War, 1865, they had ceased to be even the dominant factor of the population.

In the preceding sketch, I have attempted to portray the first great wave of Richmond immigration, and to show what part these people played in the development of the city. However, for probably a score of years preceding the time of their greatest influence and power, there had been forces at work, which were destined to reduce the prestige of the Quaker people, until at the present time they, as a people, occupy a place of secondary power in this city. The reputation which Richmond enjoys as a religious, educational and industrial center is enviable, and I would not under-rate the credit which belongs to the early Quakers for

this reputation, nor do I disparage the importance of the Quaker element in the city at the present day; but I shall now attempt to trace another wave of immigration to this city, which began in the thirties of the nineteenth century, and I shall also endeavor to show, that in proportion as the Quaker people lost influence and power, there was a corresponding rise in importance of this element which Germany contributed to our city.

To my knowledge, this subject of German immigration to Richmond has never received the attention of any writer, and, consequently, I have had practically no written material to draw on. A great part of the contents of this paper, then, is based upon what I could obtain by personal interviews with prominent Germans, and especially with the earliest German immigrants who still survive.

The great wave of German immigration to America began immediately after the close of the Napoleonic wars—1815. Most of the Germans who came to America previous to 1830, found it to their advantage to locate with their few possessions, in the States farther east than Indiana. But as our Western frontier gradually receded, we find the Germans also in the procession, and Richmond received its first family from Germany as early as the year 1833. The details concerning this first family are of especial interest, and I give them as related to me by Mr. Bennett Baumer, now eighty-seven years of age, who came to Richmond

in the early spring of 1834, and whose parents and family it was that arrived in 1833. It will be remembered that then every able bodied German subject was compelled to serve in the German army for five years, and received but four cents a day for his services. The entire army life was a hardship for all privates, and peasants resorted to various methods to escape this service in the army. It is said that it often occurred, that a peasant would purposely cut off a finger or a toe, or otherwise injure himself, in order that he might be rejected by the army officials.

In 1832, Mr. Bennett Baumer, Jr., was nineteen years of age, and lived with his parents at Damme, in the Province of Hanover. It would soon have been necessary for him to leave his home and enter the army of the King, but during the preceding year he resolved that he would escape this obnoxious five years of service by emigrating to the United States. He was the only son of his parents, and they earnestly opposed his leaving. His father was a mediocre surgeon, and finding that his son was determined to leave, he finally decided to emigrate to the United States with his entire family. The party arrived in Baltimore in the early part of 1833, where Bennett Baumer, Jr., immediately found work. The rest, however, came on down the Ohio to Cincinnati and from there they soon came on up to Richmond, then a city of less than 1,000 inhabitants. There were no other German families in Rich-

mond when they arrived, and the following are the names of Richmond's first German-Americans :

Bennett Baumer, Sr., Mrs. Bennett Baumer, Sr., Henry Baumer (brother of Bennett, Sr.), Henry Luppenbrink (son-in-law of Bennett, Sr.), and Mrs. Henry Luppenbrink.

Early in 1834, Bennett Baumer, Jr., arrived in Richmond, and he almost immediately secured work upon the foundation of what we now call the old National bridge.

A few months later in this same year (1834), at least five more young Germans located here ; the following are the names: John Peterson, Christopher Jurgens, Fred Lefker, Christopher Klute and Christopher Shofer. All of these were young men who were dissatisfied with their condition in Germany, and had crossed the Atlantic in search of their fortune. It is very probable that their desire also to escape the army was a great incentive to them to leave Germany. Some of these young men had mastered a trade, one, John Peterson, being a splendid stone mason ; but most of them, and many of the later immigrants, were simply what we would call "farm hands," or *Bauer-knechte*.

Four years later, in 1838, there arrived in Richmond two other young Germans whose names I will give, not only because they were among the first to arrive here, but also because of the fact that they are

good types in many ways of these first immigrants. The names of the two young men to whom I refer, are Bernhard Knollenberg and David Haner. Mr. Haner is now eighty-six years old, and is still living in this city. Mr. Haner says that while he was still in Germany, his one determination was to escape the army, and to do this he resolved to go to America. But at this time, in Hanover and everywhere else in Germany, it was almost impossible for one peasant to save sufficient money to pay for even a steerage passage. Mr. Haner overcame this difficulty by going first to Holland, where labor was better paid. He stayed in Holland several months until he finally had saved something over \$100, when he was joined by Bernhard Knollenberg and they sailed for America. The money likewise which paid Bernhard Knollenberg's expenses, had been earned by the latter's father in Holland; and later, by the united effort of the family in Germany, two other brothers of Bernhard Knollenberg, David and Henry, were provided with the money necessary for transportation, and in 1845, these three sons were able to assist the remainder of the family to the means necessary for the voyage to America.

It is important to notice that most of these first immigrants were from the western border of the Kingdom of Hanover, and the proximity of Holland, with its possibilities for making money, is the one thing to which many of our German fathers owe their escape

from the miserable life of the German peasants of the past century. There are some exceptions, as in the case of Mr. Bennett Baumer, Sr., who was a surgeon, and whose family was the first German family to locate in Richmond; but most of the early German immigrants were from the peasant class, who were practically penniless on arriving here, but who, on the other hand, were not slow to adapt themselves to their Quaker surroundings, and having labored industriously for some time in this city, generously gave their first earnings in our free country, to help their less fortunate kinsmen who were still in the Fatherland.

This wave of immigration to Richmond increased from year to year during the "forties," and may be said to have reached its height about the middle of the century — 1850. The great majority of Germans who have come to Richmond, arrived before the civil war, and of late years, especially, a newly arrived German is seldom seen. Therefore, we can say that German immigration to Richmond is practically ended, and this year, 1900, is an opportune time for studying them, before they, by intermarriage, etc., lose their identity as a race. We shall find the results of their coming lying all around us, and at the same time a fair retrospect of the past is possible. As a rule, we find that German has married German, and at the present time there are about three generations, including the original immigrants. I ascertained the number of these Ger-

man immigrants and their descendants who reside in Richmond at the present time, 1900, by the following method: During 1899 there was published a directory of Richmond, and this book contains 10,990 names of persons over fifteen years of age. I now, with the aid of my parents (who have lived in Richmond all their lives, and who can distinguish the names of the Germans), went through this entire directory, and counted the number of names there recorded of people who are of German extraction. We found the book to contain 3,354 German names. The total number of names in the directory being 10,990, I compute from the above figures that at the present time the people of German extraction form 30½ per cent. of the population of Richmond. Assuming that there are 20,000 people in Richmond, this estimate would give Richmond 6,100 German inhabitants. Therefore, a study of the progress of this Teutonic race, which at present forms almost one-third of our entire population, is certainly worthy of our attention.

In studying the history of a people, we find it to be divided into five distinct lines of movement. The following are the five institutional lines of progress:

1 — Industrial ; 2 — Religious ; 3 — Educational ;
4 — Social ; 5 — Political.

In the following pages I shall endeavor to trace the influence of the German people of Richmond, along each separate line of development, and to show what

position they to-day occupy in Richmond affairs. The paramount idea of the large majority of the German immigrants who came to Richmond, was the betterment of their financial circumstances. They wanted to become something more than mere "tillers of the soil." Their ambition for industrial success and freedom being their chief aim, I will treat the industrial lines first.

INDUSTRIAL.

A large per cent. of the young Germans who came to Richmond had been merely farm hands in their native country. These farm hands, or *Bauerknechte*, were, as a rule, boarded and lodged by the farmer for whom they worked, and, aside from this, the young man would average for a year's work but twenty-five German thalers, equivalent to less than twenty dollars of American money. Out of this twenty dollars he must clothe himself for the year, and then save what he could. A German girl seldom earned more than twelve thalers, or ten dollars in a year, besides her board and lodging.

In view of these facts, can anybody wonder that these people broke all ties and left their native country? Conditions in Germany were such that, unless a man possessed some wealth when he began his life, it was practically impossible to accumulate, and try as he would, he had little chance of ever owning a foot of

land. Another class of Richmond immigrants had been renters of small patches of ground in Germany, and it was with them also practically impossible to better their condition. One of the obnoxious customs bound the renter to serve the farmer at any time the latter might desire it. For this service the renter received small wages, and was required to leave his own crops or any work the moment he was summoned. It seems hardly possible that this, one of the worst of feudal customs, should still have been in operation in Germany during the first part of the nineteenth century, but it is a fact that cannot be doubted, and was substantiated by every old German whom I interviewed.

But no American citizen has ever been subjected to such bondage, and the honest old German settlers must have been astonished at the changed conditions which confronted them on their arrival. Very few of the Germans had ever owned any land in Germany, and their circumstances on arriving here were such that they could not purchase any, but yet we find that in the course of a few years' residence here, many obtained possession of a piece of ground which, under their skillful cultivation, yielded as never before. The early German settlers had a reputation for honesty, and owing to this fact a German would often get possession of a small piece of land upon the payment of a very small amount, and he would then be trusted to pay the remainder by labor or otherwise. Most of the

Germans had no definite trade when they came here, and they were, furthermore, at a great disadvantage on account of the language; yet many of the immigrants found work in the shops and mills which developed with the city, and by their characteristic frugality many of them became comfortably situated.

As the children grew up, we find them readily mastering the English language along with the German, and, as a rule, they were healthy, and splendid workers, besides being honest and religious. As the business houses of Richmond grew and prospered, there arose almost a demand for German boys. Many of the earlier Germans, whose ancestors for centuries had been German peasants, did not think it possible for a German to enter the commercial world or become anything but a common laborer. But later, we find young Germans occupying positions of more and more importance, and gradually the Germans of Richmond have come to a full realization of the fact that they are well qualified and fully competent to enter the commercial, or even the professional world, and that in America there is nothing to prevent them from doing so.

In Richmond to-day we find the German people represented in almost every line of business, and in some lines they control almost the entire business. For instance, the three largest retail dry goods houses, besides both the wholesale notion houses of the city are owned and operated by men of direct German ex-

traction, and by men who commenced the battle of life with almost nothing. In order that I might know definitely the strength of the Germans in the business of the city, I used the Dun Commercial Agency's Reference Book for 1899, which contains an entire list of the business firms of Richmond. According to the list in this book, Richmond has 468 business houses. In this number is included everything, from the smallest store up to the largest factory. Now, out of this total of 468, I found that there are 179, or 38.5 per cent. of the business houses, which are owned by men of German extraction. Through the kindness of the County Assessor, I was permitted to examine the city tax books of 1898, which contain the names of all the real estate owners. These books showed Richmond to have 4,352 real estate owners, and by going through these books carefully, with the aid of my parents, I found that there were 1,060 German names. In other words, 24.4 per cent. of the real estate owners of Richmond in 1898 were German people. In view of the fact that the Germans form 30.5 per cent. of our population, this per cent. of real estate owners does not seem large, but there are two things that must not be overlooked: First, that by the time German immigration had reached Richmond, all the land in this vicinity had been taken up, so that no German can be said to have been an original land owner; and secondly, we should view these figures in the light of the fact

that the majority of these people came to this city with practically no money, and this 24.4 per cent. of Richmond real estate has been secured with money earned by them right here in Richmond.

When we consider that in spite of many disadvantages the Germans who at present constitute 30.5 per cent. of our population have risen from almost poverty, and now form 24.4 per cent. of our real estate owners, and have gotten control of 38.5 per cent. of our business firms, we cannot but conclude that American opportunity was all that was needed by these German peasants, and also that Richmond Germans have made and are making the most of this, the greatest industrial age the world has ever known.

RELIGIOUS.

Let us now turn our attention to the influence which German immigration has had on the religious life of Richmond. St. John's Lutheran Church was the first German church in Richmond. This church was organized in 1844, and in 1846 the members erected a church building on what is now South Fourth Street. Although the majority of the earliest German immigrants were Lutherans, yet we find that the German Catholic Church was organized as early as 1846. For causes of which I will speak later, I find that almost every German who came to Richmond was thoroughly religious, and with the exception of one

man who had become disgusted with the alleged dissipations of several Catholic priests in Germany, I am unable to learn of a single one of the early Germans who did not, upon his arrival, join one or the other of the German churches. This is certainly positive evidence of the deeply religious character of the German people of that time. Although at the present time not every adult German belongs to a church, yet the religious lives of many of the older Germans have not been without effect on the succeeding generations. In order to ascertain the exact church membership of the city, I addressed letters of inquiry to the pastors of the various churches. By this means, then, I found the total resident membership of Richmond churches of all denominations to be 8,569. I also found that 3,043 of these 8,569 church members are people of direct German extraction. Almost one-third of these are German Catholics and two-thirds are German Lutherans. According to the above figures the German people, who only form 30.5 per cent. of the population, constitute 35.5 per cent. of the church members of the city.

I have already said that the German people have pressed into every field of action in the city, and the natural result has been that each succeeding generation has become less and less familiar with the German language and more familiar with the English. To meet these changed conditions three Lutheran churches have already been established in which the English

language is used exclusively. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, which was founded in 1851, and in which formerly only the German language was used, now holds English services every Sunday night, and English is used almost exclusively in the Sunday School. Even the German Catholic Church now holds English services once a month, and St. John's Lutheran Church is the only one in which the German is used exclusively, but the time is not far distant when the German language will be displaced there also. In many other ways the Germans are adapting themselves to their environment. Thus to-day we find that several of the Lutheran churches have established Christian Endeavor Societies, give liberally to the cause of missions and are co-operating with others in many of the different phases of modern religious work. The ministers of the First and Second English Lutheran and St. Paul's Lutheran Churches are members of the ministerial association of the city, but unfortunately the pastors of the Trinity Lutheran and St. John's Lutheran Churches have not joined the ministerial association and do not in any way co-operate in the general church work of the city. They base their position on Scriptural grounds, but yet I think the day will soon come when they will realize that the creed of their church does not differ sufficiently from that of other Protestant churches to warrant the exclusive course they now pursue.

To sum up, then, we will say that in view of the solid religious character of the early Germans, and of the fact that the Germans at present constitute 35.5 per cent. of the church members of Richmond, it is but just to say that from a religious standpoint the influence of the German people has been beneficial to Richmond.

EDUCATIONAL.

We will now turn our attention to the educational idea, and, just as in the case of the early Quakers, we find that the first German schools of Richmond were under the direct management of the church. In Germany, while the schools were not supported by the state, yet it was compulsory that parents should send their children to school until they were fourteen years of age. In spite of the fact that the church gave the child special religious instruction, we find that religious teaching was the prime feature of the work done in the school; the secondary branches being reading, writing and arithmetic. As a result of this system of education I find that the old German immigrants had committed to memory entire chapters of the Bible, hymns, Bible history and the catechism of the church; but outside of this religious knowledge they knew very little more than how to read and write the German language, with probably an imperfect knowledge of arithmetic.

The staunch religious faith of the original Germans who came here is attributed largely to the character of the educational system of Germany.

When the early Germans came there were no schools here except the denominational schools of the Quakers. In these schools the Quaker beliefs and customs prevailed, and of course the English language was used. For various reasons, then, it seemed best to the Germans that they should establish their own school. Accordingly, as early as 1843, or '44, a young German teacher by the name of John Stammeyer appeared, collected a few students and held school in what was then known as the Warner building, a small brick structure located where the city building now stands. This was the first German school in Richmond. It was maintained by the parents of the school children, and naturally we find that here religious teaching was the main feature, and reading, writing and arithmetic were placed secondary. A little later the different German churches were organized and church buildings erected, and since there was no legal provision for religious education as there had been in Germany, and since they desired that the instruction should be essentially religious, the most natural thing happened, which was that gradually all the German schools fell into the hands of the German churches. The schools were held in the church buildings, and many of the early pastors also served in the capacity

of school teachers. In those parochial schools the German language was taught exclusively for probably twenty years, and the instruction was almost identical with that which had prevailed in Germany. Religious instruction was uppermost in both the Catholic and Protestant German schools, and when the child came to the age of thirteen or fourteen years he was taken into the church and out of the school.

The public school system did not afford much that commended itself to the Germans in the earlier days, and consequently the German children continued to attend the parochial school, which unfortunately made very little improvement or change during the first twenty years. At last, however, public taxation was resorted to for the support of schools, and soon after the close of the civil war the public began to rely fully upon this fund. The Lutheran churches which were established since this time have never had parochial schools, and owing largely also to this development of the public school system St. Paul's Lutheran Church gave up its school about 1875. At present, then, the German people have only two parochial schools. The enrollment of St. John's Lutheran School is at present 144 students, with three instructors, and the enrollment of St. Andrew's Catholic School is 259 students, with five instructors. These two churches retain their schools for the sole purpose of giving the children instruction in the religious doctrines of their churches.

At present only religious teaching in these schools is given in the German language, and, while the religious work still receives attention, yet, at present, it is far from being the main feature of the course. It is probably not more than thirty years since the English language first crept into these German parochial schools, and the results of this one simple change have been remarkable. The old methods have been improved and displaced until at present the course has been so arranged that a student at the age of thirteen can at once enter the eighth grade in the public schools, and besides the required secular knowledge he also understands the German language, and furthermore has received the desired religious training.

These people firmly believe that the child should receive religious teaching, and it should not be thought that they therefore oppose public education. The Catholics advocate that the state shall support their parochial schools, but the Lutheran church stands for public education with non-sectarian religious instruction, and when this or some other remedy is secured all the parochial schools of the Lutheran church will disappear. Germans, then, from an educational standpoint, have not played a bad part in Richmond's progress, and while the early Germans had many wrong ideas as to education, and much effort was misdirected, yet Germany has never sent us any illiterates, but people who have always supported education and have

accepted and adapted themselves to the educational opportunities. To-day 17 per cent. of the teachers in the public schools of this city are of German extraction; one member of the school board is a German, besides two teachers in the high school and eight parochial school teachers.

SOCIAL.

At the time when the early immigrants came to Richmond we find there were four distinct social classes in Germany, and the distinctions between the classes were most sharply defined. As a whole, the Richmond Germans belonged to the lowest social order, and for themselves there was practically no chance for social advancement. But hospitality and sociability are characteristics which were observed by Tacitus in the German barbarians nearly two thousand years ago, and, at least, in this respect, the German character of to-day is unchanged. However, I find that an industrial element ran through almost all of the simple amusements of the German peasants, and their very condition in Germany made amusement for amusement's sake alone almost entirely out of the question.

Since these Germans have lived in Richmond, these social ideas have naturally changed very much, but even now, especially at the social gatherings of the German women, we almost always find the industrial element. On the other hand, we find that among the

younger generation, dancing, cards and theater-going are indulged in to quite an extent. The Germans are represented in almost every lodge in the city, and one of these secret orders is composed entirely of German members. Their natural talent and love of music has led to the organization of various German Glee Clubs, and certainly in the line of music, Richmond owes much to its German citizens.

But I must not neglect to speak of the one other social club, which has so many German members. It does seem that wherever the German may locate, he must have his saloon, and Richmond has been no exception. I will not dwell on the evils of intemperance, but will simply say that, at present, fully two-thirds of the saloons of Richmond are owned by Germans. It cannot be denied that the Germans have greatly increased the liquor traffic in Richmond, and their influence along this line has been decidedly detrimental.

POLITICAL.

The German peasant, as I have previously shown, had small chance for industrial advancement, and less chance for social advancement, but least of all did he possess political liberty in Germany. I will not attempt to describe the governments of the German Kingdoms in the first half of the nineteenth century, suffice it to say that they were despotic and the German peasant had absolutely no voice in governmental affairs. I find that

the major part of the German Catholics of the United States have joined the Democratic party, while most of the German Protestants have joined the Republican party. However, here in Richmond, I find that for some unknown cause, almost all of the original Protestants, as well as the German Catholics, joined the Democratic party, and consequently, although to-day fully two-thirds of the Germans are Protestants, yet the majority of the Germans of Richmond vote the Democratic ticket. Richmond being a strongly Republican city, and the German vote being largely Democratic and badly divided, doubtless accounts, to some extent, for the fact that few Germans have obtained prominent political positions.

One of the most striking features of the German character is its respect for law and authority. The United States has suffered much from time to time at the hands of mobs and anarchists, but the history of these riots shows that they are not participated in by the immigrants from Germany. The Germans are intelligent, industrious, frugal, and therefore contented. A very large per cent. of the laborers in the shops of Richmond have always been Germans, and there is hardly a city anywhere which has been more free from strikes or where the laboring man is better contented than right here in Richmond.

We have now traced the German influence along each of the five institutional lines of progress. It is

plainly seen that the good effects of these people have not been unmingled with evil influences, yet, beyond doubt, Richmond is to-day a richer and better city than it could possibly have been without these German citizens. Their religious and educational influence has been far superior to that of the average European immigrant, and in the commercial world they have achieved success, to the honor and advantage of both themselves and their city. No city or country has anything to fear from honest, well-meaning immigrants, and Richmond should recognize the good that has been wrought here during the past fifty years, by the honest toil of German hands.

